

**The Face and Voice of SBB CFF FFS:  
A Sociolinguistic Study of Multilingualism for the Branding of a Swiss Institution**

**Abstract**

Drawing on observations of passenger attendants on long-distance trains, interviews, publicly available institutional documents and linguistic landscaping in eight stations, this MA thesis examines the construction of language hierarchies and the ideologies behind the management of institutional multilingualism at SBB CFF FFS, the main Swiss national railway company. It aims to understand how language is used to brand the railway company as a Swiss institution, through an exploration of the use, role, status and ideologies associated with English and with the three official languages of Switzerland. The critical qualitative analysis of data reveals that the hierarchies of institutional languages in this company (re)produce the territorial principle of Switzerland. In addition, the national languages are ideologically treated as markers of authenticity and national identity to brand the company as Swiss, while English is adopted as a global language that renders the SBB CFF FFS competitive on the global market. In conclusion, the participants in this study are regarded both as institutional representatives of the SBB CFF FFS and as embodiments of the Swiss national identity through multilingualism on the basis of their privileging the Swiss national languages over English.

*Keywords: Switzerland, railway company, multilingualism, branding, language commodification, language ideologies, English Lingua Franca.*